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Hartford

District 1199NE

Before the Labor Committee

In Support of SB 938 An Act Concerning Unemployment Benefits for Striking Workers

Good Afternoon Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez and members of the Labor Committee. My name is Kayan Stewart, I live in Hartford, and I am a Certified Nurses Assistant (CNA) at three nursing homes, Windsor Health and Rehab in Windsor, Kimberly Hall in Windsor, and Trinity Hill Healthcare in Hartford. I have worked in nursing homes for four years and I love the work I do. I come before you today to testify in support of SB 938.

As a CNA my job is to take care of my residents and to make sure their needs are met. We attend to residents' hygiene, helping them shower and bath themselves. We feed residents and ensure they are eating enough and staying hydrated. I love my residents and will act a fool if I must to make them happy. I will sing to them, make jokes with them, and do anything I can to make them smile. It's not in our job description, but CNAs also care for the mental health of our residents. Many residents don't see their family for weeks or months at a time, so while we are not related by blood my residents are my family.

The decision to go on strike was not an easy one. Our first concern was for our residents. Were they still going to receive the care they deserved if we weren't there? Our next immediate concern was for our families. Many of us have elderly family members and children that rely on us. How would we get by, pay our bills, and provide for our families. Bosses depend on this fear to manipulate and exploit us. This unfair dynamic allows for caregivers like myself to be taken advantage of and forced to work in unsafe conditions for poverty wages.

That is why my coworkers and I decided we needed to take a stand, and in April of last year went out on strike. We struck not only so that we could have the respect and dignity we deserve as workers, but so that the next generation of caregivers could work in better conditions than we do. Being on strike was scary. Every day for the month we were on strike we had to face the uncertainty of how we would continue to pay our bills and survive. We were fortunate that our union, 1199, helped to support us, but even with their help we struggled to make ends meet.

If my coworkers and I had access to unemployment benefits we would have been more confident in exercising our rights as workers. The weight of supporting our families and children wouldn't have been so crushing, and we would have been able to find more peace of mind as we fought for our dignity.

Please pass SB 938 so that workers across the state can stand up for themselves and their families without the fear of financial ruin. This is the right thing to do and will lead to a more just society here in Connecticut.

Thank you.